

A Comparison of Child Support Paid from CPS and SIPP

Collection Period - Data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) asks questions about child support paid in the Support for Nonhousehold Members Topical Module (SNHMTM). The latest data available from this topical module was collected from June through September of 2005 in the fifth wave of the 2004 SIPP panel. The amount of child support paid refers to those payments made in the 12 months immediately preceeding interview.

The Current Population Survey (CPS)-Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) is conducted in February, March, or April and questions about amount of child support paid refers to the annual amount paid in the previous calendar year. The latest CPS-ASEC data available are from 2010, and refer to annual child support paid during calendar year 2009.

Universe Differences - The questions that ask about which household members pay child support in CPS and SIPP are similar but different in their approach and wording. Initially, the SIPP-SNHMTM asks all persons aged 15 or older whether or not they made payments for the support of their children under 21 years of age who lived outside their household during the previous 12 months. Those who respond in the affirmative are then asked a series of questions about type of payment, how many children are covered and if under 18 years of age, if payments are the result of a court order or agreement, and other questions about type of agreement and year it was reached. The respondent is then asked how much they paid in child support under this most recent child support agreement during the previous 12 months. Additional questions determine if another agreement existed that covered other children not covered by the most recent agreement, and how much was paid. A final question asks how much was paid for children living outside the household where there was no type of agreement in place. The sum of the amount responses to these three questions determine the total amount of child support paid.

The CPS-ASEC asks all persons 15 years and older whether they have any children living elsewhere with their other parent or guardian at anytime during the previous year. Each individual who satisfies this requirement is then asked whether or not they were required to pay child support and how much was paid in totality during the previous calendar year.

Estimate Differences - As seen in Table 1, the SIPP-SNHMTM estimates that during 2004-2005 there were 5.4 million support payers, weighted from a sample of 1,697 responses in the topical module. In contrast, the CPS-ASEC shows only about half as many weighted support payers, 2.7 million, based on responses from 1,801 respondents who reported paying child support.

Apart from the large magnitude difference in universe sizes, the distributions of child support paid between CPS and SIPP are relatively similar. Additionally, the mean child support paid in the 2010 CPS was \$6,163, or 5% higher than the adjusted amount found in the 2004 SIPP panel (\$5,347, or \$5,874 in adjusted 2009 dollars). When multiplied by the universe, the aggregate amount of child support paid from the CPS (\$16.8 billion) was 46 percent lower than the adjusted aggregate support paid in SIPP (\$31.5 billion).

Table 1. Child Support Paid Comparison, SIPP 2004 Wave 5 vs CPS 2010 ASEC

	Unweighted 2010 CPS		Weighted 2010 CPS		Unweighted 2004 SIPP		Weighted 2004 SIPP	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total paying support	1,546	100.0	2,763,000	100.0	1,697	100.0	5,364,000	100.0
ANNUAL AMOUNT PAID								
\$1 to \$499	114	7.4	220,000	8.0	159	9.4	465,000	8.7
\$500 to \$999	52	3.4	75,000	2.7	100	5.9	281,000	5.2
\$1,000 to \$2,499	222	14.4	366,000	13.2	325	19.2	1,017,000	19.0
\$2,500 to \$4,999	365	23.6	675,000	24.4	498	29.3	1,538,000	28.7
\$5,000 to \$7,499	391	25.3	713,000	25.8	302	17.8	955,000	17.8
\$7,500 to \$9,999	163	10.5	267,000	9.7	118	7.0	420,000	7.8
\$10,000 to \$12,499	91	5.9	186,000	6.7	98	5.8	343,000	6.4
\$12,500 to \$14,999	55	3.6	100,000	3.6	19	1.1	61,000	1.1
\$15,000 to \$24,999	73	4.7	125,000	4.5	55	3.2	189,000	3.5
\$25,000 or more	20	1.3	36,000	1.3	23	1.4	95,000	1.8
Mean								
SEX								
Male	1,422	92.0	2,551,000	92.3	1,474	86.9	4,745,000	88.5
Female	124	8.0	211,000	7.6	223	13.1	619,000	11.5
RACE & ORIGIN								
White (alone in SIPP)	1,214	78.5	2,138,000	77.4	1,172	69.1	3,464,000	64.6
Black (alone in SIPP)	253	16.4	531,000	19.2	263	15.5	898,000	16.7
Asian Alone	48	3.1	58,000	2.1	27	1.6	112,000	2.1
Residual	31	2.0	35,000	1.3	92	5.4	229,000	4.3
Hispanic origin	226	14.6	381,000	13.8	165	9.7	747,000	13.9

AGE

Under 30	199	12.9	388,000	14.0	223	13.1	659,000	12.3
30 to 39	575	37.2	981,000	35.5	599	35.3	1,847,000	34.4
40 to 49	580	37.5	1,019,000	36.9	627	36.9	2,062,000	38.4
50 to 59	166	10.7	327,000	11.8	205	12.1	677,000	12.6
60 and over	26	1.7	47,000	1.7	43	2.5	118,000	2.2

MARITAL STATUS

Married	595	38.5	926,000	33.5	661	39.0	1,959,000	36.5
Widowed	10	0.6	18,000	0.7	17	1.0	46,000	0.9
Divorced	554	35.8	1,035,000	37.5	639	37.7	2,043,000	38.1
Separated	110	7.1	227,000	8.2	117	6.9	433,000	8.1
Never Married	287	18.6	557,000	20.2	263	15.5	882,000	16.4

EDUCATION

Less than HS	179	11.6	343,000	12.4	153	9.0	462,000	8.6
HS graduate	616	39.8	1,099,000	39.8	584	34.4	1,848,000	34.5
Some college	493	31.9	845,000	30.6	660	38.9	2,081,000	38.8
College degree	243	15.7	447,000	16.2	300	17.7	973,000	18.1